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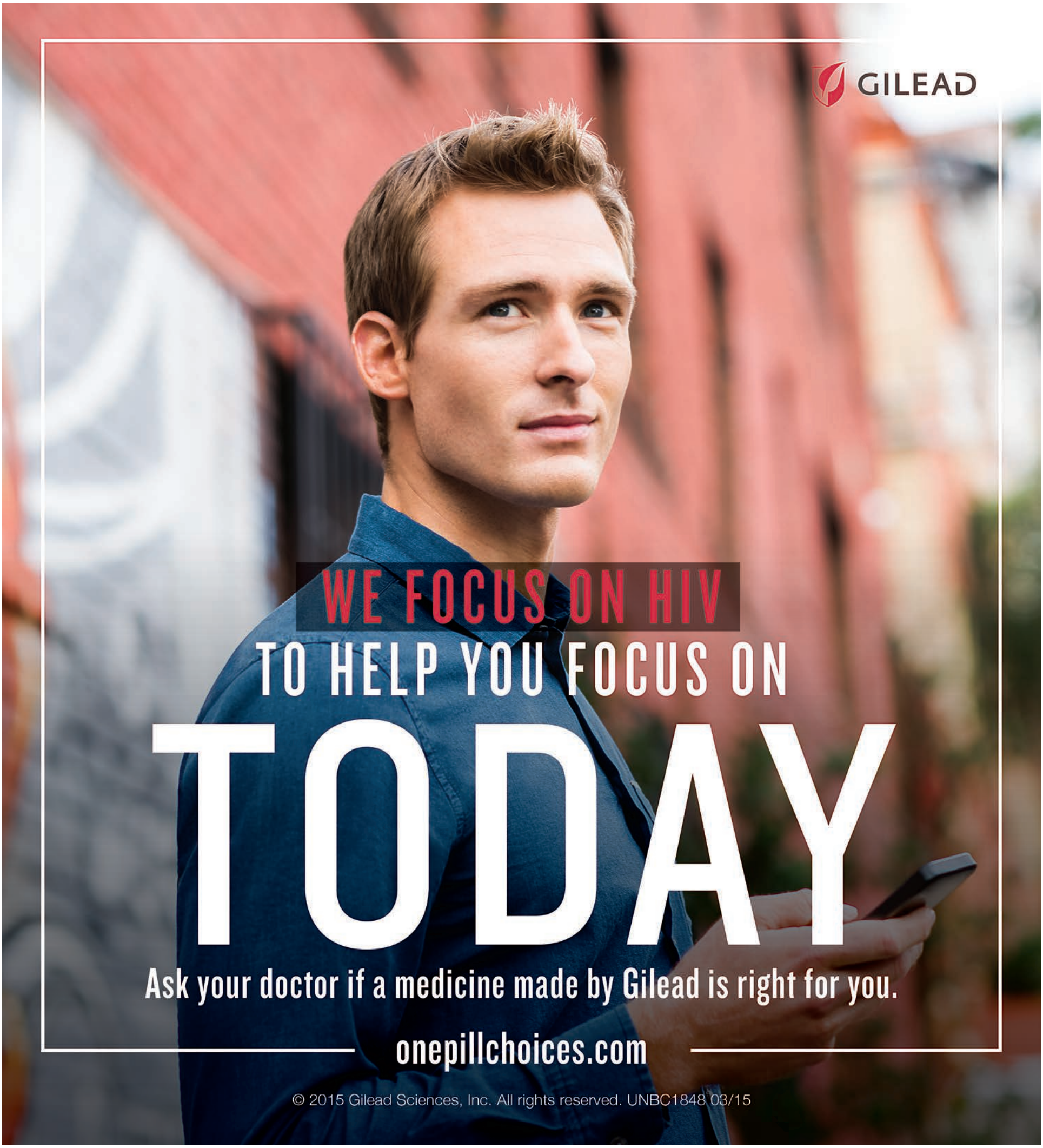
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> It'd be beautiful if (there's not) just a white gay pride and a black gay pride – it'll be beautiful when it's just pride and it's not separate.
>
> – Mo'Nique,
> See page 20

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MILESTONE

Hotter Than July is poised to celebrate its 20th anniversary next week.

Preview: A Week Long Schedule To Celebrate Hotter Than July's 20th Anniversary

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NEWS

What LGBT Michiganders Need To Know About Healthcare

With the historic ruling by the Supreme Court affirming marriage equality for everyone regardless of which state they live in, a new world of opportunities is opening for Michigan's LGBT community. Many Michiganders may not realize that once the wedding bells are done ringing, they have a special opportunity to enroll in quality, affordable health coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace.

Getting married is considered a "qualifying life event" under the Affordable Care Act. This means that newly-married couples qualify for a "special enrollment period" which allows them to sign up for a new health plan through the Health Insurance Marketplace or make changes to the plan they enrolled in during the last open enrollment period.

So when LGBT Michiganders tie the knot, they can start their new life together with the protection of health insurance that fits their needs and budget.

Six things LGBT Michiganders should know about healthcare now that they can legally get married:

All newly-married couples can enroll in a plan through the Health Insurance Marketplace right away before enrollment reopens in November. If married this summer, there's an opportunity to enroll in Health Insurance Marketplace coverage. Additionally, if applying for Medicaid, every state must recognize a same-sex marriage regardless of where it was performed.

The special enrollment period will start the moment marriage documents are signed and end 60 days later, so there's time to sign up after the honeymoon.

Legally married couples – including same-sex newlyweds who are getting married in Michigan – can receive financial assistance as a married couple. Seventy-eight percent of Michiganders who enrolled in coverage received financial assistance to lower their monthly premiums, Get Covered America reports. The average Michigander who enrolls through the Marketplace sees a reduction of $273 in their annual premium.

Every plan must cover 10 essential health services, including emergency room visits, prescription drugs and preventive care. No one can be denied preventive coverage because of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Free, one-on-one enrollment assistance from culturally competent experts is available.

Without health insurance, Michiganders will pay a fine on their next tax return. The fine for not being covered in 2015 is $325 per adult or 2 percent of the annual income, whichever is greater.

Other life changing events also qualify Michigan's uninsured to enroll through a special enrollment period. These events include: certain changes in income, having a baby or moving to a different coverage area. Enrollment in Medicaid is year-round for those that qualify.

Visit the Get Covered Connector at www.getcoveredamerica.org/connector to see where free, local enrollment assistance is available and schedule an appointment.

Extended briefs are available online at:
>> www.PrideSource.com

Cover Story: Unsung Hero

BY ED ENGLISH

Changing the tune of his career aspirations, Bobalik, 33, now uses his voice for advocacy as a newly hired fundraiser at the ACLU. BTL photo: Andrew Potter

Once you've won a Grammy Award with your voice, it's a tough act to follow.

"Well … I was on a Grammy-winning recording," explains Stephan Bobalik, coyly. The award was for a ensemble recording of composer William Bolcom's "Songs of Innocence and of Experience" that featured nearly the entire University of Michigan's school of music. "The work required immense musical forces. So yeah, I'm on a Grammy-winning recording. I don't know if I can officially say I have a Grammy, sometimes I do," he laughs, adding, "My name is in the liner notes. So there's that."

As a vocal performance major at the University of Michigan, Bobalik knew he wanted a career that would utilize the power of his voice.

"When I started college, I would have told you I was going to be an opera singer … I am not an opera singer," he says with a laugh. "About half way through my first senior year of college, I was having the realization that the direction I was going, pursuing a career in voice, wasn't really what I wanted."

Changing the tune of his career aspirations, Bobalik, 33, now uses his voice for advocacy as a newly hired fundraiser at the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union), a vital role in Michigan's fight for equality.

"I worked at Sphinx (Organization); I worked on the Obama campaign of 2012. I worked at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. And last year I was working on Mark Schauer's campaign for governor – all terrific places to work, terrific missions," says Bobalik, explaining, it has always been important for him to work for an organization where he would have a strong connection to the mission. His involvement with the ACLU first began five years ago as a volunteer. "And I think it's an honor to be a part of it. I am here raising the money to make sure we can keep all this going and to work with our donors who see what we are doing as something that's fulfilling. I knew a lot of people at the ACLU, so it was a match made in heaven I like to think."

And in case you're wondering, he doesn't miss a day of the stage spotlight.

"It's interesting. I think one of the things I most disliked about performing is being the center of attention," he says with laughter. "So not really super into being the center of attention."

Not completely retiring his singing talents, each Sunday Bobalik sings in the church choir at Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church in Detroit. A place he "kind of fell in love with" after moving to the Motor City from Ann Arbor eight years ago.

> *"This concept of married today and fired tomorrow is very real today in Michigan."*
>
> — Stephan Bobalik

"When I first moved down here, if you would have told me that eight years later I'd still be here, I would have said that's insane. (I would have said) I'm going to move in two years to an actual big city where they have things like public transportation and coffee shops that are open on the weekends," he says. "I didn't know anyone who lived in the city when I moved down here and slowly met a bunch of awesome people."

Raised in the small town of Sturgis, Michigan, Bobalik says he has learned to have a great sense of pride for the resilience of Detroit and its LGBT community.

"I think (pride) means being proud of who you are and accepting who you are, but not stopping there. Being an advocate for your community," he says. "It's one thing to be out and proud and scream it from the rooftops. But it's another thing, and a step that I think more folks should take, to learn to be a real advocate for the LGBT community and work for meaningful change."

Speaking about the Supreme Court's ruling on same-sex marriage, Bobalik says it's nice to celebrate, but there is still work to be done in all communities.

"This concept of married today and fired tomorrow is very real today in Michigan," he explains. "Bullying and harassment in schools, gender markers on licenses, transgender discrimination – these are all things we need to work through before we can claim a full victory. So you know it's something to be celebrated. But the fight goes on. We can't rest on that. We should celebrate. But then the (opposing) side is absolutely putting together a huge war chest to roll things back where they can. And we've got to be able to counter that, not only with money but also with our voices and with advocacy."

INFO

ACLU of Michigan
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High-Impact HIV Prevention Project Gets $3.8 Million From CDC

Community Health Awareness Group Partners With LGBT Detroit And TEEN Hype

BY BTL STAFF

DETROIT – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that Community Health Awareness Group (CHAG) has been awarded a cooperative agreement to implement comprehensive high-impact HIV prevention projects for community-based organizations. The total amount funded over five years will be approximately $3.8 million.

CHAG will provide HIV prevention services for members of racial/ethnic minority communities. These services will focus on those at greatest risk of acquiring and transmitting HIV infection, syphilis and hepatitis B and C. In partnership with Teen HYPE and LGBT Detroit, African-American men having sex with men (MSMs) and high risk heterosexuals will be targeted, with a focus on youth 15-24.

> *"CHAG, LGBT Detroit and Teen HYPE all serve those at risk or infected with HIV in different ways, so coming together to utilize our individual strengths jointly is a natural fit. This collaborative project will transform the delivery of HIV prevention services for the African-American community, providing resources and support to improve the health of those most impacted by HIV."*
>
> – CHAG CEO, Cindy Bolden Calhoun

"CHAG, LGBT Detroit and Teen HYPE all serve those at risk or infected with HIV in different ways, so coming together to utilize our individual strengths jointly is a natural fit. This collaborative project will transform the delivery of HIV prevention services for the African-American community, providing resources and support to improve the health of those most impacted by HIV," said CHAG CEO, Cindy Bolden Calhoun. "The program aligns with the National HIV/AIDS Strategy which has at its core the unifying vision that 'the United States will become a place where new HIV infections are rare and when they do occur, every person, regardless of age, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or socio-economic circumstance, will have unfettered access to high quality, life-extending care, free from stigma and discrimination.'"

Using CDC approved prevention interventions, the project will identify HIV positive people earlier, get them into care sooner and keep them in care to help them live healthier lives and further reduce the spread of the disease. The goal is to have more HIV, syphilis and hepatitis testing, with more infected individuals becoming aware of their status. Ultimately, more HIV positive individuals will receive HIV medical care, medication assistance, behavioral prevention interventions and essential support services. In addition, HIV negative persons will become more aware of their risk and more of them will obtain prevention interventions and essential support services, including Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

The program is built around formalized collaborations with HIV primary care clinics and community based organizations providing substance abuse treatment, mental health services, housing and other essential support services necessary to stabilize and maintain HIV positive individuals in HIV medical care. It also includes program promotion, outreach and recruitment utilizing social network strategies, targeted outreach and enhanced social media along with targeted HIV testing using rapid testing technologies along with comprehensive HIV prevention with HIV positive persons and high risk negatives.

Online

Founded in 1985, Community Health Awareness Group is a leader in HIV prevention and care services. Learn more at www.chagdetroit.org

Now 10 years old, Teen HYPE (Helping Youth by Providing Education) is a movement to empower the next generation of leaders. Learn more at www.teenhype.org

Founded in 1994, LGBT Detroit's areas of focus includes health, education, employment and social justice. Learn more at www.lgbtdetroit.org

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Ypsi's Mayor Focuses On Building Local Economy

BY AJ TRAGER

YPSILANTI – By day, Amanda Edmonds is executive director of Growing Hope, an Ypsilanti based nonprofit that improves nutrition, encourages self-reliance and promotes positive community futures. By night, she serves as the mayor of Ypsilanti, balancing the needs of nearly 20,000 residents with the financial needs of the city.

Edmonds won the election in November 2014 by a landslide, winning 97 percent of the vote. Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Edmonds moved to Michigan in the mid-1990s and is a twice alum of the University of Michigan School of Natural Resources and Environment.

Many cities in the country have what is called a weak mayor system, where the mayor's powers of policy-making and administration are by charter.

"A part-time mayor is a better way to say it," Edmonds joked.

Ypsilanti has a city manager who runs the day to day operations of the city and a council. Edmonds doesn't decide on roads or manage the police chief. She is chief elected officer but not the chief operating officer. Ypsilanti Township also has another unit of government, governing just over 50,000 people. The city of Ypsilanti is only 4.3 square miles with Eastern Michigan University entirely within the city's borders. So, a big chunk of the city is non-taxable.

"Like many cities in the country, in southeast Michigan overall, the financial situation for the city to survive and thrive is hard and has been since the recession," Edmonds said.

Ypsilanti has a pretty challenging financial situation, and Edmonds says there are many reasons the city is in such a financial position. Unlike some communities that have had emergency financial managers, the financial struggles of Ypsilanti aren't due to corruption. Edmonds says there is strong central government that is trying to function with fewer and fewer resources and do the same amount of things.

"It's not like in my nonprofit sector where, if my budget shrinks, I can stop doing something. You have the same scope, the same geography and about the same people and," Edmonds said, "that just is real."

Edmonds works on strengthening policy, strategy and city-wide priorities as part of the governing body and serves as, in her words, "ambassador" – which is partially why she ran for mayor.

"The former mayor described it to me. He said, 'I think of it more as domestic and international relations.' Domestic because the mayor chairs the city council and has one of seven votes. And international relations is because the mayor represents the city a lot in meetings with boards and other bodies and publicly in many ways."

As a part-time mayor, there is plenty to do. Edmonds has to choose what she will focus on and where she wants to put extra energy. She is currently working on economic development for the city.

Ypsilanti Mayor Amanda Edmonds

Being an out LGBT person of power who is focused on community change and outreach, Edmonds works in the art and science of messaging and says the hard part is the public exposure and the negative statements she gets from critics.

Economic development for Edmonds is holding discussions on buying from local businesses with EMU, the biggest employer in the city; working with some of the problem sectors that the community has identified through a master planning process called "Shape Ypsi"; focusing on the growth areas of opportunity the city provides; and determining how to connect the dots between what the city needs and the services that are readily available.

The Ypsilanti community has already identified what it needs, Edmonds said, so she works on furthering conversations to identify where more collaboration can happen to move the communication forward.

"I am really passionate about local economy and locally, independently owned businesses and how we strengthen our local economy," she says, "and how we as a city government work with area partners around policy work and system work that strengthens the local economy."

However, Ypsilanti just reached a poverty rate of 30 percent.

"That's no joke," Edmonds pressed. "While there is real struggle going on, there are also all sorts of awesome things. We have a strong local business community that is racially and culturally really diverse in terms of ownership. My vision, and to me my charge as mayor, is how we continue to build up and develop in a way that is really inclusive and helps people thrive."

Ypsilanti was one of the first cities in Michigan to pass an LGBT non-discrimination ordinance in 1997. City residents tried twice to repeal the ordinance, but both times their efforts were unsuccessful.

"I think people think of Ypsi as a pretty welcoming place," Edmonds said. "We don't have a gay bar, but it's a pretty welcoming place. I think Ypsi is a place where a lot of LGBT people come and buy houses."

Ypsilanti is an affordable place to buy property. Edmonds says that Ypsi has many LGBT neighborhoods that are so integrated into the Ypsi community that they don't need to identify as LGBT-specific.

Being an out LGBT person of power who is focused on community change and outreach, Edmonds works in the art and science of messaging and says the hard part is the public exposure and the negative statements she gets from critics.

"That's hard stuff to open yourself up to," said Edmonds. "That's real and you're very, very vulnerable. It's still hard for me to not let that kind of thing eat away at me. I don't experience as much as some people in other places, but some still hurts just as bad."

Edmonds was happy to be one of the mayors to sign onto the amicus brief for DeBoer v. Snyder, one of the same-sex marriage cases that went before the U.S. Supreme Court, and is listed as one of nearly 500 "Mayors for the Freedom To Marry."

"I am grateful for the opportunity to learn everyday," she adds, "and to do my best everyday and learn my way through a really big and challenging position."

Coulter Announces 2015 Campaign For Mayor

BY AJ TRAGER

FERNDALE – Mayor Dave Coulter has announced his bid for the 2015 Ferndale Mayoral elections.

Coulter was appointed as mayor of Ferndale by City Council in January 2011 after former Mayor Craig Covey vacated his position to serve as county commissioner. Coulter served four terms as county commissioner but left his position to run for a state Senate race.

The deadline for adding a name to the mayoral race is July 21.

"Like most communities, our biggest problem has been financial. The recession wreaked havoc on our city budget. We are recovering from those problems," said Coulter. "By necessity my number one job is looking to deliver outstanding services at less cost. It's not the sexiest thing in the world, but it is something every mayor needs to do."

Ferndale Mayor Dave Coulter

If elected, this will be Coulter's third term serving as the mayor of Ferndale. Coulter believes that Ferndale is a beautiful place to live and raise children, but much has to be done before it is the shining community that it can be. And he has a plan.

Coulter wants to continue work on the downtown area and help rebuild and maintain the parks in the areas he says have been struggling since the recession.

"We have more work to do in our downtown in both planning and strategy to encourage more parking and retail businesses," Coulter said. "I will continue to work on both of those issues and do whatever I can to make sure that Ferndale continues to be an inclusive and aggressive community where everyone feels valued and able to contribute to our city."

Like many communities in Michigan, the mayor only works part-time and shares executive roles with the city manager. Coulter also works as a senior program officer at the Children's Hospital of Michigan foundation.

"In both my jobs it is not enough just to have a good idea. You need to have a credible plan to implement your idea and actually sell measurable results," Coulter said. "So at the foundation we give money to projects that we think have a high likelihood of success. As mayor there is no shortage of ideas, but the question is where do you invest a limited amount of resources? We try to do that in areas of measurable interest. I'm a data guy. You need to demonstrate to your residents that you are saving money, improving services or whatever else your objective may be."

In his 2015 State of the City address, Coulter acknowledged the pristine quality of Ferndale's roads, that crime rates are down to figures not seen since the 1960s and are continually dropping, and how changes in city maintenance hiring saved the city half a million dollars.

Even though quality of life continues to rise in Ferndale, Coulter would like to see more development and growth within the city and for the LGBT community. Affirmations, the 10th largest LGBT community center in the country, calls Ferndale its home and sits directly downtown on the Nine Mile stretch. Coulter says 10-15 percent of Ferndale residents identify as LGBT, and the presence of Affirmations only affirms the inclusive atmosphere that Ferndale tries to embody.

"As an openly LGBT man, it is important to me that we are not only inclusive in Ferndale but also that LGBT people are treated equally," Coulter said. "I am proud that in this last term we were able to expand our healthcare benefits to domestic partner benefits for our employees. Making sure that every employee and resident knows that they have equal access to the benefits of this community is personally important to me."

Coulter has married a few same-sex couples in the past year and takes his responsibility to demonstrate the city's commitment to same-sex partnerships very seriously. On June 26, Coulter married two couples and he officiated another marriage last week. He expects that number to rise in upcoming months.

"Even though I am a gay mayor, I am just as mindful about protecting the rights of all residents of Ferndale, including people of other minority groups. Gay is just one subgroup of our population," he added.

Visit Coulter's campaign website for more details and learn how you can contribute to his race for mayor at www.davecoulter.com.

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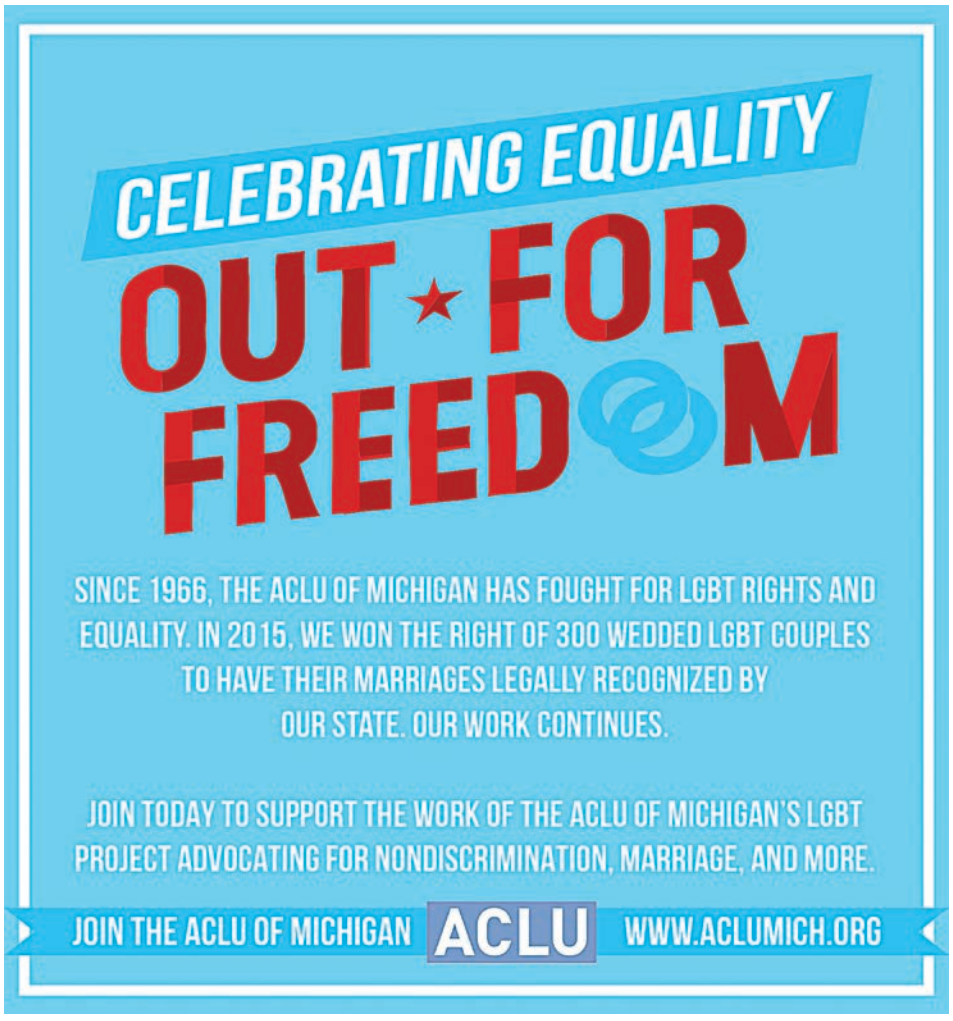
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OutCenter Board Names New Executive Director

The OutCenter Board of Directors announced the appointment of current Interim Executive Director, Mary Jo Schnell, as executive director effective Aug. 3.

Mary Jo Schnell

The board indicated that Schnell is a highly skilled leader who will be an excellent steward of the OutCenter's mission and effective advocate for LGBT people and their families in southwest Michigan.

Schnell has assisted the OutCenter in past years and took on the role of interim executive director in 2012, where she worked with the board, staff, consultants, interns and volunteers to prepare and pivot the organization's operations, programs and protocols to abide by nonprofit business practices. She led the restructuring of key programs including the Teen Pride Program, which increased attendance by 92 percent, as well as the LGBT-plus Cultural Competency Training which continues to help agencies and organizations better reach and serve LGBT people and their families.

Before joining the OutCenter, Schnell had more than 20 years experience working in all levels of the national and local nonprofit sector, gaining a multitude of skills from her leadership roles as executive director, and serving as an organization board member to her time spent in fundraising and as program staff. She has experience with direct service organizations, planning and rolling out national trainings and conferences to create dynamic program-specific learning communities, as well as with organizations focused on creating positive change in communities large and small.

"The OutCenter will continue to play a unique and vital role in creating truly whole communities across southwest Michigan," Schnell said after accepting the position. "I am honored to have the opportunity to lead the OutCenter in engaging the community, strategic partners and leadership in all sectors to fully realize equality in southwest Michigan, where LGBT-plus people and their families are welcomed, respected, valued, understood and afforded the same rights and responsibilities as everyone else."

"The board is excited to have Mary Jo as the head of the OutCenter team," Board President Paul Lane said. "Her leadership and experience are vital to the organization as we work with our partners to strengthen and preserve equality for all in southwest Michigan."

OutCenter was founded in 2003 and seeks to provide support and advocacy for the respect, understanding and nondiscrimination of LGBT people and their families in southwestern Michigan.

Washtenaw Pride Picnic Seeks Hosts, Sponsors

The Jim Toy Community Center is hosting its annual Washtenaw Pride Picnic this August and is looking for hosts and sponsors for the event.

The picnic will take place from 12-3 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 1 in Ann Arbor's Allmendinger Park. Admission to the picnic is $5 for adults and free for children 18 and under. All proceeds benefit the center.

For more information and to become a sponsor, visit www.jimtoycenter.org.

HTJ To Celebrate 20 Years Of Black Gay Pride Next Week

BY JASON A. MICHAEL

Nkozi and Austin at the 2014 picnic. BTL file photo: Jason A. Michael

DETROIT – The 20th installment of Hotter Than July – Detroit Black Gay Pride – will take place next week.

Kevin Griffin, Johnny Jenkins and Curtis Lipscomb founded Detroit Black Gay, Inc. in 1995 to produce the event. They called upon the groups Men of Color, who hosted an annual picnic, and the Billionaire Boys' Club, who hosted an annual brunch, and asked them to help produce the first HTJ in 1996.

"We asked the leaders how they felt about hosting their events during this one week we called Hotter Than July and they agreed to anchor it," said Lipscomb. "They put aside their egos to be a part of something greater."

The first HTJ featured an opening candlelight vigil, a conference, a picnic in Palmer Park and the brunch – four events that have continued uninterrupted for two decades. "Our programming has been unique and diverse since day one," said Lipscomb. "Though some activities have come and gone, we know the tastes of the community have changed. It's been 20 years. It can't be the same."

As HTJ swiftly grew, there were soon more events to attend than there were days of the week. The BBC added anniversary parties to the mix, the Ken Collier Memorial Fund threw an annual White Party, Strongarm Productions always hosted something hot and women's events were plentiful thanks to groups like the A. Lorde Collective, Ladies of a Current Affair and Pink Ice Productions. But times have changed. There are far fewer social clubs in the community now and, actually, far fewer nightclubs that are either black owned or cater to a black gay crowd. By 2011, Detroit Black Gay, Inc., now called the Black Pride Society, was struggling and having difficulty keeping the community engaged. So they looked to one of its founders for help. Lipscomb is executive director of LGBT Detroit (formerly Kick – The Agency for LGBT African Americans), which began producing a more streamlined HTJ in 2012 with key staffers and volunteers in charge of specific events.

The Week At A Glance

This year's HTJ starts as always with the candlelight vigil in Palmer Park on Tuesday. Speaking at this year's vigil will be controversial Detroit City Council President Brenda Jones. A highlight of this event will be the installation of a memorial plaque in the park made of stone and bronze. The plaque will be installed at the blue spruce memorial tree in recognition of community members who are no longer living.

The annual boat cruise along the Detroit River was scheduled for Wednesday but has been canceled due to slow ticket sales.

For the first time in a few years, an official HTJ opening party will take place. The theme of the party, which will take place at The Woodward, is "Wet & Wild."

Thursday is the annual HTJ Film Festival. This event will feature the Detroit premiere of the documentary "Collective Voices: Wisdom of our African American Lesbian Elders." The film is directed by Debraha Watson, who will attend the screening and take questions afterward. Also showing will be the musical classic "The Wiz" starring Diana Ross. The location for the festival is the Cass City Cinema, located at 3420 Cass Ave. in Detroit.

The Annual Gathering on LGBT Issues, which was for many years known at the Genesis Summit, will take place on Friday at the Michigan State University Detroit Center, which is located at 3408 Woodward Ave. in Midtown. Presenters include Noel Gordon, foundation project manager at the Human Rights Campaign; Marvell Terry, II, also of HRC; Lisa Whitmore Davis of AARP Michigan; and Phillip A. Simmons of Phillip A. Simmons & Associates. Rev. Roland Stringfellow of Metropolitan Community Church Detroit will present a keynote address. The four former presidents of Detroit Black Gay, Inc. and the Black Pride Society will be honored. They are Johnny Jenkins, Hank Millbourne, Kim Jones and Robert Clark, who will be honored posthumously.

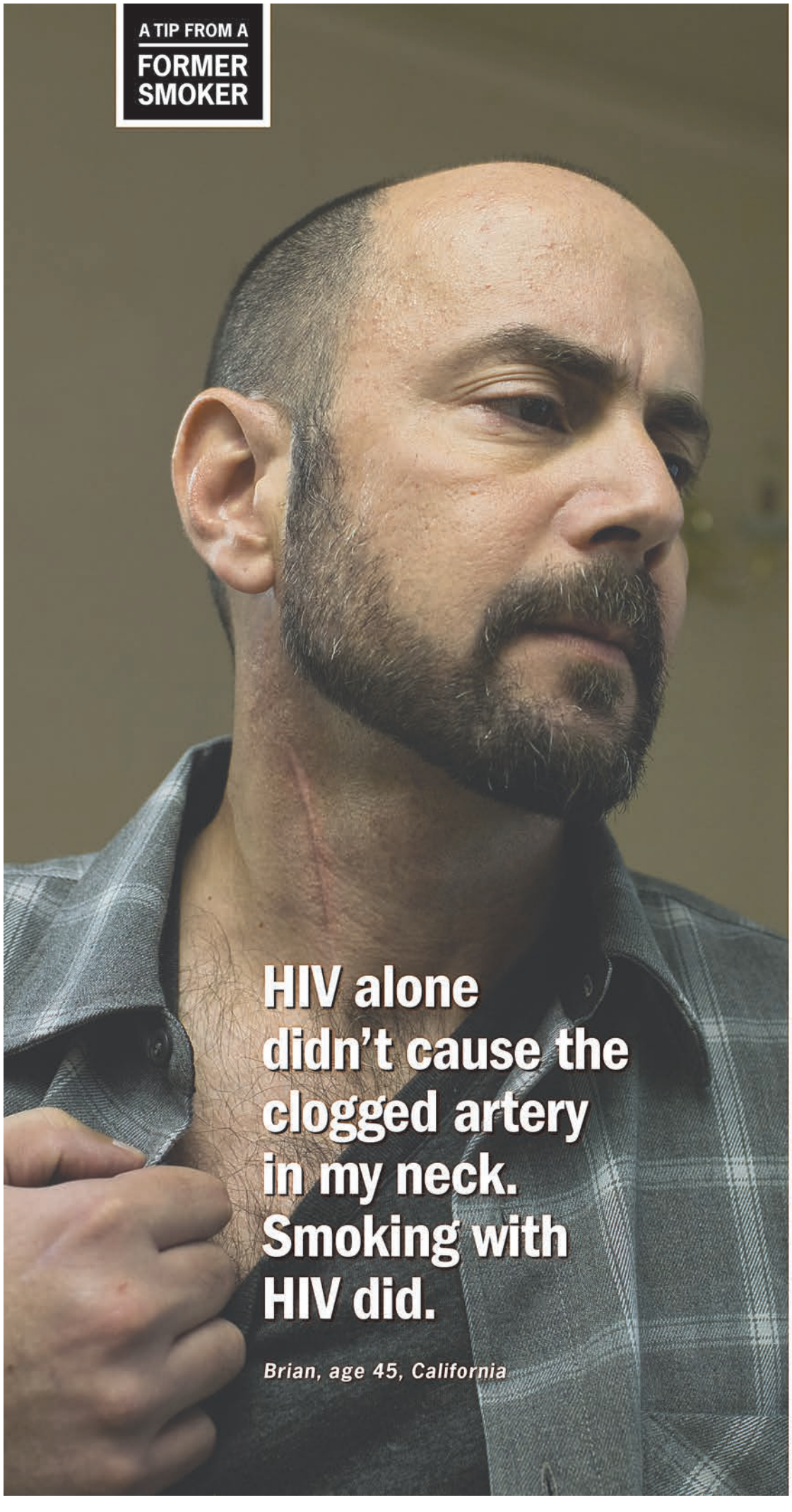
The biggest event of the week will undoubtedly be Saturday's picnic in Palmer Park. DJ Tone, DJ Darryl G and DJ Matt Holidaye will play for the crowd and there will be an HTJ showcase featuring Fantaysa Dior, Raven Devine, Samantha Brazil, Davana Couture-Malone, Cierra Dior Malone, Innocence Rodeo, Jasmine Dior, Romeo Milliown and Rajhn Star-Studded King. There will also be performances by Charlie B. Keys, Tia Taylar, J-Leeb and Chalice B. Keys as well as a fashion show presented by Austin Christopher featuring the work of designers DL Perrett and LCM Glam Boutique.

Things wrap up on Sunday with two events. The first is a worship service organized by Whosoever Ministries. It will be begin at 11 a.m. and take place at Ecumenical Theological Seminary at 2930 Woodward Ave., Detroit. The second is the annual brunch. Produced by Imagine This Productions, the brunch will take place at 1917 American Bistro, located at 19416 Livernois Ave., Detroit. This event is likely to sell out, so tickets should be purchased in advance.

Of all the events scheduled throughout the week, Lipscomb said the 20th anniversary of HTJ is all about memories – both reliving old ones and making new ones.

"I'm looking forward to the memories," he said. "To those who were here in 1996 sharing, and I'm looking forward to having people who were not here in '96 listen and share their thoughts. I'm also looking forward to hearing the memories of loved ones who are gone. A lot of people who were a part of Hotter Than July are no longer here."

For more information on Hotter Than July, visit www. hotterthanjuly.org.



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Pentagon Announces Plan To Lift Transgender Military Ban

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS & BTL STAFF

WASHINGTON (AP) – The Pentagon's current regulations banning transgender individuals from serving in the military are outdated, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Monday, ordering a six-month study aimed at formally ending one of the last gender or sexuality-based barriers to military service.

Carter said he is creating a working group that will review the policies and determine if lifting the ban would have any impact on the military's ability to be ready for battle. But he said the group will begin with the presumption that transgender people should be able to serve openly "without adverse impact on military effectiveness and readiness, unless and except where objective, practical impediments are identified."

The plan, which was first reported by The Associated Press, gives the services time to methodically work through the legal, medical and administrative issues and develop training to ease any transition, and senior leaders believed six months would be sufficient.

"The Defense Department's current regulations regarding transgender service members are outdated and are causing uncertainty that distracts commanders from our core missions," Carter said in a statement released Monday. "At a time when our troops have learned from experience that the most important qualification for service members should be whether they're able and willing to do their job, our officers and enlisted personnel are faced with certain rules that tell them the opposite."

Carter asked his personnel undersecretary, Brad Carson, to lead the working group of senior military and civilian leaders to take an objective look at the issue, including the costs, and determine whether it would create any insurmountable problems that could derail the plan. The group would also develop uniform guidelines.

During the six months, transgender individuals would still not be able to join the military, but any decisions to force out those already serving would be referred to Carson. One senior official said the goal was to avoid forcing any transgender service members to leave during that time. That official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Some of the key concerns involved in the repeal of the ban include whether the military would conduct or pay for the medical costs of surgeries and other treatment associated with any gender transition, as well as which physical training or testing standards transgender individuals would be required to meet during different stages of their transition.

Officials said the military also

See Trangender Military Ban, next page

Responses To The New Policy

"Trans people are willing and able to serve their country, and should be able to do so while remaining true to who they are. The Pentagon announcement confirms what we have known for a long time: outdated military regulations, which automatically label trans service members as medically unfit for duty, have no basis in reality. Over the past year, service branches have allowed some individuals to serve openly without risking immediate separation, but the regulations on the books keep those service members and their commanders in a constant state of administrative limbo. Everyone has been waiting for senior officials to provide clear leadership on this issue. It sounds like that leadership is coming – and not a moment too soon."

– Joshua Block, senior staff attorney in the ACLU's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and HIV Project

"Active duty trans military personnel, all they want to do is serve their country honorably just as they have been and they want to do it in an authentic way. The only was to do that is to allow them to live their authentic lives and be their authentic selves.

They need to be able to not only be out and trans but they need to also be able to transition while they are in the military. Experience shows us, in all other areas where people are allowed to do this, that they become more dedicated to their tasks, not less dedicated. Countries all over the world are already doing this and it is long past time that we do this."

– Char Davenport, chair of the Tri-Cities chapter of Transgender Michigan and Vietnam Navy Veteran.

"The policy adjustments necessary to allow transgender Americans to serve openly are simple, straightforward, and cost effective, and have already been tested and proven by allied militaries in the U.K., Australia, Canada, and Israel. As the DOD Working Group drafts these policies, we will continue to provide subject matter expertise and field reports from our hundreds of transgender SPARTA members currently serving in uniform."

– Allyson Robinson, Army veterans and director of policy at SPARTA, the LGBT association for for active duty service members, veterans and their families.

Kristin Beck

"We are elated at the announcement that soon officially the transgender military ban will be eliminated. This brings ease to selfless heroes who deserve equal dignity and respect. We look forward to continually working with the Obama Administration and Pentagon officials on a clean, swift and effective plan to close out this chapter of discrimination. Today is a great step forward for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for the United States of America."

– Kristin Beck US Navy SEAL (retired) and Shane Ortega Sergeant US Army (actively serving), two of the most nationally covered leading advocates to repeal the ban.

► Transgender Military Ban

Continued from p. 12

wants time to tackle questions about where transgender troops would be housed, what uniforms they would wear, what berthing they would have on ships, which bathrooms they would use and whether their presence would affect the ability of small units to work well together. The military has dealt with many similar questions as it integrated the ranks by race, gender and sexual orientation.

Transgender people — those who identify with a different gender than they were born with and sometimes take hormone treatments or have surgery to develop the physical characteristics of their preferred gender — are banned from military service. But studies and other surveys have estimated that as many as 15,000 transgender people serve in the active-duty military and the reserves, often in secret but in many cases with the knowledge of their unit commander or peers.

"Obviously this isn't finished, but Secretary Carter's clear statement of intent means that transgender service members should and will be treated with the same dignity as other service members," said Allyson Robinson, Army veteran and policy director for an association of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender military personnel called Service Members, Partners and Allies for Respect and Tolerance for All, or SPARTA.

> *"The Defense Department's current regulations regarding transgender service members are outdated and are causing uncertainty that distracts commanders from our core missions."*
>
> – Defense Secretary Ash Carter

Brynn Tannehill, who was a Navy pilot before leaving the force and transitioning to a woman, recalled the difficulties when serving.

"It was stressful and it was something that I couldn't talk with anyone about, because if you even breathed a word of it you didn't know what was going to happen," said Tannehill, who still serves in Individual Ready Reserve. "You could lose your career, that I'd worked so hard for."

Several Congress members, including Rep. Adam Smith, ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, expressed support for Carter's decision. But the more conservative Family Research Council questioned the change.

"Considering the abysmal condition of our military and a decline in readiness, why is this a top priority for the Obama administration?" said retired Lt. Gen. Jerry Boykin, the council's executive vice president. "The Pentagon must answer whether this proposed policy makes our military more capable of performing its mission. The answer is a very clear and resounding no."

The move follows several weeks of high-level meetings in the Pentagon among military chiefs, secretaries and Defense Department leaders, including one Monday involving Carter and the chiefs of the various services.

Military leaders have pointed to the gradual — and ultimately successful — transition after the ban on gays serving openly in the military was lifted in 2011. Although legislation repealing that ban passed Congress in late 2010, the military services spent months conducting training and reviews before the decision actually took effect the following September.

The latest Pentagon move comes just weeks after the Supreme Court upheld the right of same-sex couples to marry.

Officials familiar with the Pentagon meetings said the chiefs of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force did not express opposition to lifting the ban. Instead, they said the military leaders asked for time to figure out health care, housing and other questions and also to provide information and training to the troops to ensure a smooth transition.

Although guidelines require that transgender individuals be dismissed from the military, the services in recent months have required more senior leaders to make the final decisions on those cases, effectively slowing the dismissal process.

The transgender issue came to the fore as the military struggled with how to deal with convicted national security leaker Chelsea Manning's request for hormone therapy and other treatment while she's in prison. Manning, arrested as Bradley Manning, is the first transgender military prisoner to request such treatment, and the Army approved the hormone therapy, under pressure from a lawsuit.

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Parting Glances

OPINION BY CHARLES ALEXANDER

There's nothing quite as ho-ho-hum as other people's sex lives. Unless, of course, they're young, pretty, age legal and available of their own good-natured free will or by tax-free monetary inducement.

In the course of my three-score-and-19-or-other, I've investigated many marvelous nooks and a few incredible crannies of a decidedly libidinous nature. And, like a goodly share of my older cronies, I've learned that the adage I had heard woefully repeated to me in my 20s, "Nobody wants you when you're old and gay," ain't necessarily so.

Not by a long shot. (Viagra not withstanding.)

For those of you who plan to live well past mid-age studhood marketability (the crossover usually hits in tidal waves of dieting, exercising, hair tinting, fibbing, padding and panic, say age 35, or a generously repetitive age 39), please mark your perpetual youth desk calendars.

More than likely you'll still be able to perform – not as sure fire often, not as grandly choosey of your multiple partners or your serial monogamy cohorts, but certainly a little more expertly – at 50, 60, 70 and, if you try extra hard, at 80. (But don't hold your penis breath. Or his.)

Like everybody else, those of us who are wrinkle-roomers (especially male) think a lot about sex, even if we pretend not to. Sex as a commodity of day-to-day daring do lurks alluringly everywhere, 24/7. On TV, in the movies, books, magazines (and certainly denounced and/or titillated over each Sunday from thousands of begrudging or envious church pulpits).

When I was a kid, say 12 or 13, my sexual knowledge could be summed up as playground zero. My folks never discussed sex. I recall my total shock at finding a copy of Sexology magazine, with dozens of incomprehensible Gray's Anatomy illustrations, stashed under the cushion of a living room chair. (Hey, teeny boppers, been to Barnes & Noble lately?)

Here are media items gleaned to make your view from over the hill conversationally brighter. The first comes under the rubric of "nosegay." (Source: "The Science of Orgasm," Johns Hopkins Press.)

According to the authors, a certain unnamed, but nonetheless enterprising –- presumably happy, high on pot – young man was able to achieve the Big O by applying an electric vibrator to his nose and to his knee cap.

Applying the selfsame double-AA instrument to his schwantz, he climaxed with an unexpected bon voyage: "an image of an ocean liner appeared (to him) in the distance, being raised from the depths by an uplifted hand."

For what it's worth, the authors clinically opine, "This description indicates that there was coherence among somatic, visceral and cognitive activities leading up to the orgasmic moment." (No wonder gay sea cruises are so popular.)

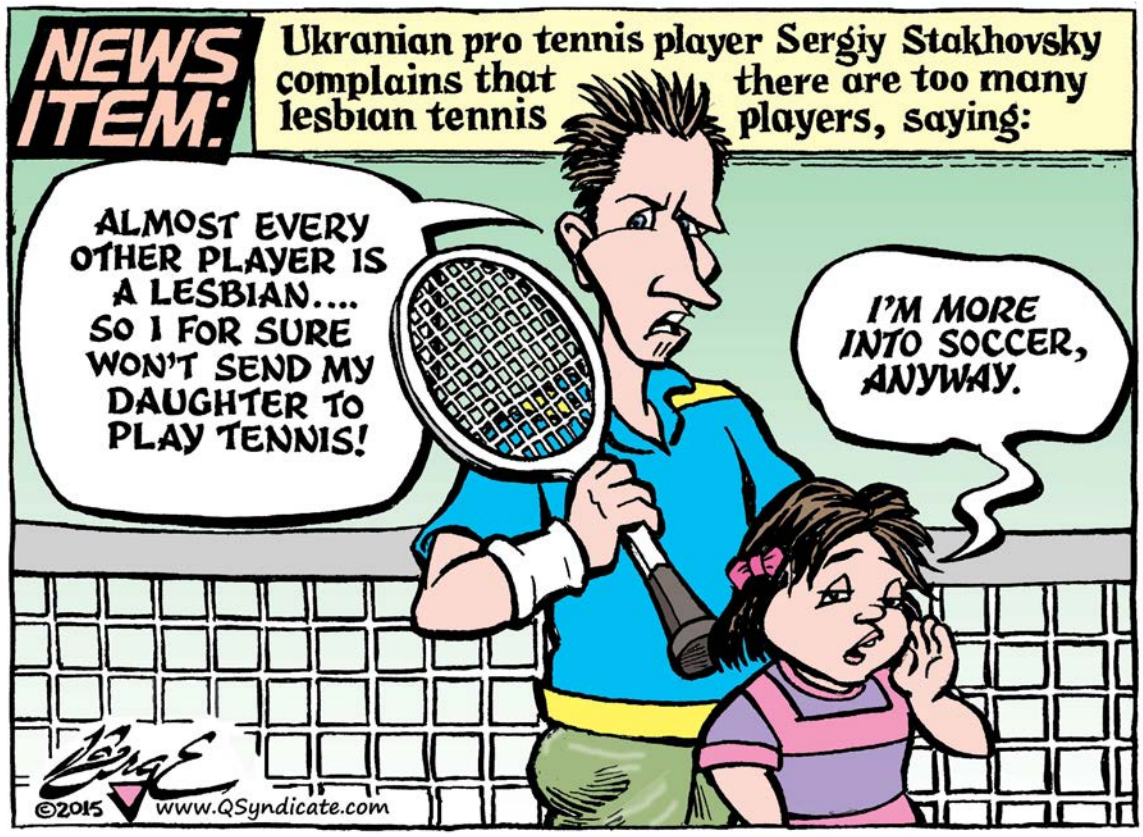
For those who remember the "God, was I drunk last night" syndrome, here's a twist. It's called "sexsomnia," according to an in-depth article in the British publication New Scientist. "For most of us, sex and sleep don't happen at the same time. When they do, it can be an emotional and legal disaster." (Count your bedtime sheep, Mary. Just don't bugger them.)

And, this from a tell-all issue of Mother Jones. Subject, "The Way of All Flesh." Expose! On Christian sex sites, anything goes, so long as you are married and shun porn. Oral and anal sex, toys and fantasies. Mild pain through spanking. All are possibilities.

One wonders how Solomon managed with 600 wives and a goodly number of concubines.

Probably worn about by his third go-around of being 39.

Charles@pridesource.com


NEWS ITEM:
Ukranian pro tennis player Sergiy Stakhovsky complains that there are too many lesbian tennis players, saying:
ALMOST EVERY OTHER PLAYER IS A LESBIAN.... SO I FOR SURE WON'T SEND MY DAUGHTER TO PLAY TENNIS!
I'M MORE INTO SOCCER, ANYWAY.
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A Papal Confrontation

Transmissions

OPINION BY GWENDOLYN ANN SMITH

Pope Francis recently released an encyclical – a letter the pontiff sends to all the Roman Catholic Church's bishops – addressing climate change. As you can imagine, many on the right-wing have been up in arms over it long before it had even been penned.

This particular encyclical letter, titled "Laudato si,'" speaks of the need to reduce the causes of climate change, putting the blame squarely on humanity in the process. It's a great move by a pope who has been largely praised for being very progressive and forward thinking, especially in light of Pope Benedict XVI.

Yet buried in this 184 page letter is something only tenuously related to the climate, and something much more in line with the core beliefs of the right-wing than perhaps anything else in the encyclical.

Pope Francis started by quoting his predecessor, who said in a 2011 address that, "Man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. Man does not create himself. He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself.

From this, Pope Francis said the following: "It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology."

"Also, valuing one's own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different," he continued. "In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek 'to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.'"

This is not the first time Pope Francis has made

See Papal Confrontation, next page

► Papal Confrontation

Continued from p. 14

similar statements, and indeed, the last part of the previous paragraph referred to an address of his from last April. That address, on the family and subtitled "male and female," contained many attacks on gender theory.

"I ask myself, if the so-called gender theory is not, at the same time, an expression of frustration and resignation, which seeks to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it," said the pontiff in that address. "Yes, we risk taking a step backwards. The removal of difference in fact creates a problem, not a solution."

The pope was even more direct than in "This Economy Kills," published in February.

"Let's think of the nuclear arms, of the possibility to annihilate in a few instants a very high number of human beings," he stated. "Let's think also of genetic manipulation, of the manipulation of life, or of the gender theory, that does not recognize the order of creation. With this attitude, man commits a new sin, that against God the Creator."

This last quote reminds me that it was Christine Jorgensen who, in 1952, pushed atom bomb tests off the front pages when she returned to the U.S. after her gender reassignment – but that's about as close as I can get to equating those like me with the world's nuclear arsenal.

I was not raised Catholic, and aside from assisting my father in photographing weddings at St. John Vianney, my personal experiences with Catholicism are largely academic. Indeed, my whole childhood experience has caused me to have a very strong agnostic streak. I don't mind any belief that any one wishes to hold dear, provided it harms none. With the pope's words, he's gone against that.

I think he is spot on when he speaks of the environment, about man's greed and how that has damaged Mother Earth – but to take that same opportunity to tell transgender people to somehow "suck it up" seems nothing but hurtful.

One of the hardest things for a person such as me to come to terms with is the very fact that their own physical body lies. It's not a simple matter of accepting "what God gave me," any more than it is for someone born with a cleft palate. All the things that others like me go through simply to be comfortable in our own skins has little to do with having "absolute power over creation."

I would also contend that it is Pope Francis, not I, who is facing some crises around being able to recognize his self and somehow "confront" gender differences. To borrow the old Queer Nation slogan, "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it."

I want a better world, and I want the harm done to our environment to be addressed. I am happy to see the pontiff speak out while so many other leaders won't. Yet this continual cycle of attacks on "gender theory" and transgender people from the pope is tiresome and hurtful. How many transgender people, brought up in the Catholic Church, is this harming – and how many may take their lives as a result?

With that in mind, I don't feel the good done by Pope Francis in "Laudato si'" fully outweighs the harm it can cause to transgender people – and he needs to take a new look at transgender people if he expects to be as progressive as many claim him to be.

Gwen Smith is not a nuclear weapon; she is a human being. You'll find her on Twitter at @gwenners.

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Creep of the Week

Steve King

BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, doesn't really know anything about gays and lesbians except for one thing: he doesn't like them. Not one bit.

So you can imagine this whole pro-marriage equality Supreme Court ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges is really messing with his head right now. He is very unhappy. Thus he has introduced legislation that would "reaffirm traditional marriage," which is the equivalent of throwing a legislative hissy fit.

"The traditional definition of marriage is a union between one man and one woman," King said in a statement. "In a blatant act of judicial activism, the Supreme Court perverted the word 'marriage' to create an unconstitutional right to same-sex marriage."

It's pretty easy to imagine King crossing his arms, stomping his foot and pouting as he says this. The right-wing is always hollering about "judicial activism" whenever a court rules in a way they don't like.

Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, doesn't really know anything about gays and lesbians except for one thing: he doesn't like them. Not one bit.

It's a nice touch that King uses the word "perverted" in order to underscore the fact that he thinks homos are a bunch of depraved sinners. This was the guy who last year said of gays, "What was a sin 2,000 years ago is a sin today, and people that were condemned to hell 2,000 years ago, I don't expect to meet them should I make it to heaven."

Sounds like a nice guy.

King is appalled that SCOTUS would dare rule in a way he doesn't personally approve of. "Five unelected judges imposed their personal will on the states and the American people by overturning at least 30 states whose constitutions define marriage as a union between one man and one woman," he said.

And he's not going to take it any more! So he wants to impose his personal will on America. That'll show 'em.

"It is time for Congress to speak out against this constitutionally baseless decision," his statement continues. "That is why I have introduced a resolution of disapproval to ensure the American people know that the House of Representatives strongly opposes the majority opinion in Obergefell v. Hodges."

I suspect the American people already know this. Or at least the ones who pay any attention to the number of right-wing blowhards in the House of Representatives, a body of government dominated by Republicans that has managed to get jack shit done while Obama has been in office aside from trying to take health insurance away from poor people.

King's resolution would let America know that he and his House friends accept no other definition of marriage besides "a union between one man and one woman" and that "the majority opinion unconstitutionally and indefensibly perverts the definition of marriage."

He also asserts that states can just ignore the ruling, essentially telling the Supreme Court to fuck off. In King's America, states "are not required to license same-sex marriage or recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states."

Is it against the law? Sure. But this guy's last name is King, so I guess he thinks he's the boss of the land.

Also, no surprise, there's a religious liberty net in his resolution so that "individuals, businesses, churches, religious groups and other faith-based organizations are encouraged, empowered and protected to exercise their faith without fear of legal or government interference."

In other words, this resolution encourages, empowers and protects people who are hateful and stupid, which pretty much sums up King's voter base.

Lambda Literary, New Millennium Writings Partner For 'Love Wins' Essay Competition

Essay Based On SCOTUS Ruling; Winner To Receive $1,000

Knoxville, Tenn.– To celebrate the recent SCOTUS ruling on marriage equality, New Millennium Writings, an award-winning literary journal founded in 1996, is hosting a special "Love Wins" essay competition. NMW will call for essays asking people what the recent SCOTUS decision means to them and their community. The winner will receive $1,000 and publication in the NMW anthology and on their website. The contest will run from July 8 to Aug. 31.

Over the past 20 years, New Millennium Writings has published more than 1,500 new and emerging writers and awarded over $200,000. In this competition, NMW will partner with two nonprofit organizations: Lambda Literary and Free2Luv. NMW will donate $1,000 to each organization to further their missions of supporting and empowering the LGBTQ community. Free2Luv is an award-winning nonprofit dedicated to "rockin' individuality, celebrating equality, spreading kindness and standing up to bullying through arts and entertainment." Lambda Literary believes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer literature is fundamental to the preservation of LGBTQ culture, and that LGBTQ lives are affirmed when their stories are written, published and read.

"On the heels of Marriage Equality becoming the law of the land and one of the most historic advances in LGBTQ civil rights of our time, we're thrilled to partner with New Millennium Writings on this essay contest asking our community what the SCOTUS ruling means to us," said Tony Valenzuela, Executive Director of Lambda Literary.

"We are excited to team up with New Millennium Writings to offer an essay competition that celebrates all love. In light of the recent landmark SCOTUS decision, we are thrilled to read everyone's interpretation of being Free2Luv. We are passionate about creating an environment where all youth can express themselves freely and authentically," says Free2Luv Co-Founder and President, Tonya Sandis.

The Love Wins essay award winner will be chosen by Guest Judge and Free2Luv Celebrity Ambassador Thea Gill, actress, singer and LGBTQ activist, best known for her starring role as Lindsay Peterson in the Showtime television series "Queer as Folk." Ms. Gill will choose the top winner from selected finalists, and the award will be announced on Oct. 11, National Coming Out Day.

"Special contests like this are a rarity for NMW," says Alexis Williams Carr, Editor and Publisher of New Millennium Writings. "We ran one on the eve of the millennium and another in 2008 to celebrate America's first black president – two other momentous events that impacted our nation and the entire world. We're thrilled to add the Love Wins essay competition to that list and to partner with Free2Luv and Lambda Literary."

Founding Editor Don Williams added, "Events like this truly embody what we have long hoped the New Millennium will bring – a breaking down of barriers, an embrace of tolerance and an acknowledgement of unity on the planet. This competition is an opportunity for people to share their opinions, reactions and personal stories."

Entries into the Love Wins essay competition must be 4,500 words or less. Entries may be submitted at www.newmillienniumwritings.org or mailed to the address listed on the website. The entry fee is $20, and all entrants will receive a copy of NMW's high-quality anthology.

More information about the Love Wins literary competition can be found at www.newmillenniumwritings.org, www.Free2Luv.org and www.lambdaliterary.org.

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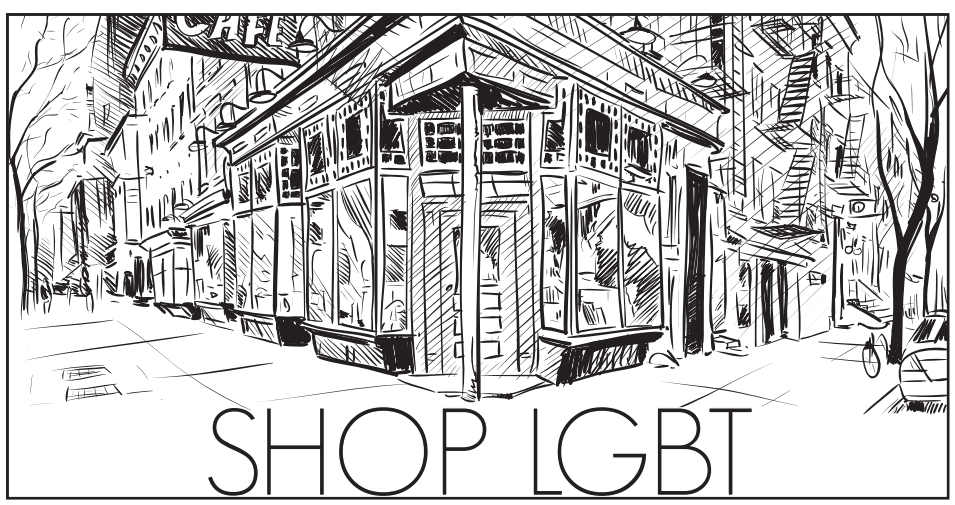

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Oscar Winner Talks Gay-Themed Film, LGBT Integration & An End To Coming Out

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Mo'Nique isn't one to hold back. Take her ongoing clash with Lee Daniels, who directed her Oscar-winning performance in 2009's "Precious." Daniels said the 47-year-old's behavior got her "blackballed"; she, on the other hand, says Hollywood isn't "playing fairly."

As the actress' latest film "Blackbird" hits DVD and VOD, Mo'Nique discussed how the back-and-forth feud wouldn't stop her from working with Daniels again; her belief that if she doesn't have to come out as straight, nor should LGBT people; and the childhood mantra that brings her comfort when the media is on her back.

"Blackbird" tells the story of someone who's looking for acceptance from the outside world but also from within. Have you been there? Do you know what it feels like to be an outsider?

I think every human alive understands what it means to be an outsider. We've all been outsiders in one situation or another, so of course I've felt like an outsider before. But it's OK to be an outsider.

What situation did you find yourself in that made you feel like an outsider?

Baby, when I wanted to be a high school cheerleader and they didn't think I could wear the little small skirts and do the kick.

As an LGBT ally, where do you go internally to play someone like Claire, the homophobic mother in this film?

I go to honesty, because I know those mothers and I know those fathers that have and are having a really difficult time accepting the babies that they brought into the world. They can't understand, "How can my baby be born that way?"

What do you hope "Blackbird" conveys to those parents?

That it's OK to love your baby through it. That it's OK to love your baby because your baby has done absolutely nothing wrong. It's OK to let your baby be who they were born to be and who they were made to be with no apology. Claire really feels like this is a sin, and we're hoping that for our brothers and sisters who are really having a rough time because of their religion, that they walk away and see the devastation it can do to human beings, because you have no control over that.

It's a message that says it's OK to walk in your truth. It's OK when it's not popular or no one understands. It's OK. To have the chance to play with a fearless director (Patrik-Ian Polk) that's so willing to tell the truth in its rare form – I really thought I would never get that opportunity again.

Why do you say that you never thought you'd have that chance again?

Because I think oftentimes we can be afraid to tell the real story. When I was so fortunate to do a movie called "Precious," it was such a raw story – those people truly exist and truly get treated in that manner – and I just never thought I would get the opportunity again to be able to play with someone who was so fearless, so that's what I mean when I say that.

You mention "Precious," which you worked on with director Lee Daniels. You and he are currently entangled in a "he said, she said" back-and-forth, and I'm wondering: Do you feel

like the media is taking sides?

Well, do you feel like the media is taking sides?

I'll say this: I just read a story that claims your "Precious" co-star Gabourey Sidibe "slammed" you with a tweet that said, "It's sad to see a project like "Precious," that was made with such love, be dragged through the mud by selfishness and lies." How do you process stories that make you out to be the problem?

You know, I really don't. When you know the truth, you don't have the energy to process that kind of media. And this is coming from Mo'Nique's mouth – there is absolutely nothing the media could write or say that would stop me from loving that beautiful young lady the way that I love her, because I was there on that set with that baby and I watched her do things that were just breathtaking and mind-blowing. I watched that young lady be fearless. I watched her do it with no judgment of herself. I watched that woman shine. So, regardless of what people write and what people say, I love that sweet, beautiful baby.

So you don't find it difficult to brush off media slams?

Remember when we were kids and parents would say, "Sticks and stones, they break your bones but names..." – I mean, we're nothing but kids with grown-up faces. If you can still hold onto those things, then you don't get affected by it.

Would you ever work with Lee Daniels again?

I'm gonna say of course I would, because Lee Daniels is a brilliant director, a brilliant writer, and he is absolutely fearless when it comes to telling that story on the screen.

You had said that the scripts never stopped coming after "Precious," but aside from 2009's "Steppin: The Movie" and now "Blackbird" you haven't appeared in a movie since "Precious." Were you just passing on them?

I passed on most of them because the offers didn't make sense. When you speak to Tyler Perry and he says to you, "If you get nominated, your next film is gonna be between $3 and $5 million, and if you win it, it's between that and $8 million" – well, I appreciated the information he gave to my husband (Sidney Hicks) and I. We appreciated that. But there have been no offers that have come in from the studios that have appeared that way. The offers that were actually coming in were lower than what I made before I won an Oscar.

Why do you think that is?

That's the big question. I can't answer why that is, but when you hear our beautiful sisters Patricia Arquette and Gwyneth Paltrow say we need wage equality and they're our white sisters, well, what do you think we're getting being women of color?

What I will say is, while there are those people out there who just believe (they) can play unfair, there are also those people out there who say we are going to play fair – it's a company called HBO. I did a movie with HBO called "Bessie" and it's amazing. Queen Latifah plays Bessie Smith and she is, hands down, absolutely brilliant in her performance (Mo'Nique plays the openly bisexual Ma Rainey).

When HBO called, they played fair. The offer that they gave was more money than I've ever been offered before *and* after this Oscar, so I say that everybody that buys into the game of "let's just see if we can get them for whatever we can get them for," there are those that do play fair, so I have to applaud HBO for playing fairly when they called for me to do the movie "Bessie."

Are black women treated unfairly in Hollywood?

Let me ask you this, Chris: When have black women ever been on the totem pole to be paid the highest? When has that time happened? Never. So do you think it's happening right now? It's not something that's happening. Our (white) sisters say we want wage equality – and they're absolutely right, and it got applause that night (at this year's Oscars) as it should have. But if they're saying it, once again, what do you think we're getting?

What the gay community has always appreciated about you, Mo'Nique, is the ease with which you speak your mind.

That's what "Blackbird" is about, because even though we're discussing this situation – and there are people who are saying, "Mo'Nique, aren't you afraid to say it out loud?" – that's the same thing that people are telling our babies who were born the way they are, and they're saying, "Aren't you afraid to say you're gay out loud?"

We're hoping this movie stops the coming-out announcement. I never had to come out to say, "I'm a heterosexual." Never had to go on anybody's show. Never had to write a book. Never had to apologize. Never had to say, "Guess what, Chris, I'm a heterosexual!" Let people be.

Isaiah Washington is a close friend of yours, and actually brought the role of Claire to you. He also stars as your husband in the film. Though he's since apologized, Isaiah upset many people in the LGBT community after calling his "Grey's Anatomy" co-star T.R. Knight a "faggot." Considering his controversial past with the gay community, did it surprise you to know he was involved with a film about the same community he once offended?

Because I know Mr. Washington personally, it was an honor when he called to say, "Please do this," because, again, I know him personally and that's a good brother. So I don't believe there was a problem that he had with the gay community – I don't believe that. Because again, I know him and he's

See Mo'Nique, page 22

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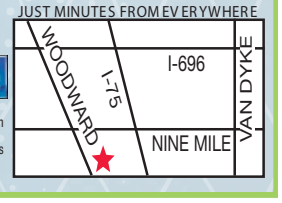

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Photo: KBiz Entertainment

► Mo'Nique

Continued from p. 21

good in his heart.

He plays the father, and the father that he plays, that's who Isaiah is when it comes to people having equality and being who they are. As executive producers of this piece of work, (my husband and I) truly believe it will change people's hearts and minds and will open us up to loving each other.

From your experience with black gay culture, do you think it's more difficult for black gay men to be out?

I think that it's hard for *any* man to be out. See, there was a time I did feel that way until I started doing the festivals for "Blackbird," and at those festivals we were being approached by white men, Asian men, black men. They were all saying the same thing – that's my story. So there was a time I did feel that way, and the reason I felt that way was because that was the only community I was in to see it.

I think it'd also be beautiful if (there's not) just a white gay pride and a black gay pride – it'll be beautiful when it's just pride and it's not separate. Again, what this movie says is equality, but what this movie also says is love is so powerful and so beautiful. You don't get caught up in, "Oh my goodness, it's two men"; you get caught up in, "Oh my goodness, they're so in love."

You have "Blackbird" coming out on VOD July 24, and then HBO's "Bessie." But do you see yourself ever taking on a role in a big-screen film for a major studio?

You know what, I am in a big major screen film and it's called "Blackbird." (Laughs) If you accept the perception people put out there, then you buy into it. For us, for my husband and I, to see this movie make it to the big screen – you're talking about friendship since we were 14 years old, in the 10th grade – so for us, baby, we have a *big* motion picture film, and it's called "Blackbird."

Chris Azzopardi is the editor of Q Syndicate, the international LGBT wire service. Reach him via his website at www.chris-azzopardi.com.

Martha Wash performs July 24 at Chene Park.

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INFO

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Thelma Houston

A Mississippi native, Houston's fame hit when she teamed up with Motown Records. The single "Don't Leave Me This Way" reached No. 1 on Billboard's Hot 100, R&B Singles and Dance Music charts in 1977. The gold record earned her a Grammy for Best Female R&B Vocal Performance.

Houston, who has been performing now for 45 years, recently released her 23rd album, "A Woman's Touch," on Shout Factory Records. To date, Houston has racked up 15 charting singles on Billboard's R&B chart. Currently, Houston is touring with "Thelma Houston's Tribute to Motown, Music, Memories & More," a new show designed to pay homage to her Motown roots.

Cheryl Lynn

It was 1978 when Lynn made her grand entrance onto the music scene with the breakout hit "Got To Be Real." It was a Top 10 R&B single and Top 40 pop single that quickly went gold. To this day, it remain in heavy rotation on urban radio. Lynn followed up "Real" with the hit "Star Love," which became a favorite of female impersonators across the country.

Other hits include "Shake It Up Tonight," produced by Ray Parker, Jr.; "If This World Were Mine," a duet with the late Luther Vandross; and the number one R&B single "Encore" from 1983. The album it was released on, "Preppie," became Lynn's second album to go gold.

See Raining Divas, page 33

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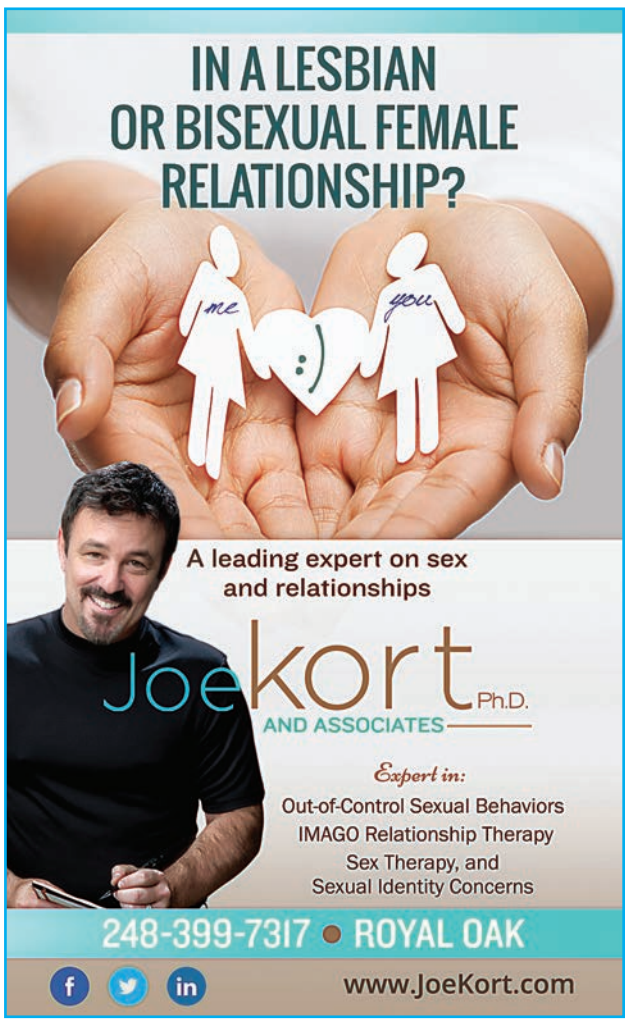

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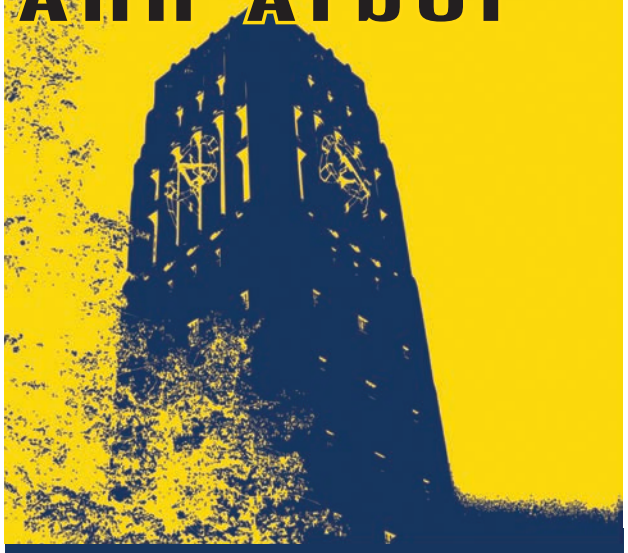

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Annual Theater Fundraiser Features Ann Arbor Vendors, Serves Up Fun

The Purple Rose Theatre Company is proud to announce its fourth annual Backyard BBQ Fundraiser beginning at 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 2. The BBQ will feature a farm-to-table dinner created by Zingerman's Roadhouse with vegetarian options, cocktails, live music by The Ben Daniels Band and auction activities.

All guests will enjoy a brief overview of the 2015/2016 Purple Rose 25th Anniversary season of plays. Auction items will include an exclusive Detroit Lions Training Camp package, as well as autographed Lions official football and framed jersey. Wine enthusiasts will love Chef Common's deluxe lobster bake/wine/theater evening for 12, or the Califorina Wine Country weekend for four at LangeTwins Lodi estate. Other travel packages include guided freshwater fishing adventures, a Costa Rica escape, a New York Broadway long weekend or a Luxury Racing Getaway for 10 at Churchill Downs with Jockey Suite, Winners Circle and stay at Roseheights Estate.

Entertainment options include an inclusive Premium Suite for 12 to enjoy Kenny Chesney's concert tour, or Dress Rehearsal tickets and VIP Backstage Tour for the 2016 Tony Awards. The silent auction includes a selection of gift certificates/services, jewelry, memorabilia and more.

Updated listings and more information can be found at www.purplerosetheatre.org/bbq. Backyard BBQ sponsorship is provided by Cornman Farms, Varsity Ford, Steve & Sheila Hamp, Encompass Financial Partners LLC/Assetmark, Spring Arbor University, TJX Companies, American 1 Credit Union, A.R. Brouwer Company, Bridgestone Americas, Chelsea State Bank, Hobbs & Black Architects, Peak Manufacturing, and Rick Taylor, Real Estate.

Aug. 2 fundraiser features dinner, music, live & silent auction and world-premiere performance of "2AZ."

Additional thanks are given to hospitality, design and print service sponsors Edgar Norman Creative, Gigi's Flowers, Goetzcraft Printers, LangeTwins Family Vineyards, Laura O' Brien Sweets & Treats, and Print-Tech, Inc.

Additional sponsorships are still available; contact Gerie Greenspan, geriegreenspan@purplerosetheatre.org for detailed benefit packages. Proceeds from the event provide operational support for The Purple Rose Theatre's mission to present more than 300 professional performances annually, sustain development of new work that preserves the legacy of American Theatre and educational/outreach programs serving diverse communities in the region.

The event will be held at Cornman Farms, located at 8540 Island Lake Road in Dexter, only seven miles from The Purple Rose Theatre. Ticket prices are $75 and $125 per guest. For $75, guests may attend the BBQ cocktails and buffet dinner, auctions and ever-popular Wine & Dine Pull from 3:30 to 7:45 p.m. For $125, guests enjoy cocktails and BBQ, live/silent auctions and receive a ticket for the 8 p.m. performance of "2AZ" by Michael Brian Ogden, including a themed-dessert intermission.

For more information or to reserve tickets, visit www.purplerosetheatre.org/bbq, call 734-433-7782, ext. 14 or email ReachUs@purplerosetheatre.org.

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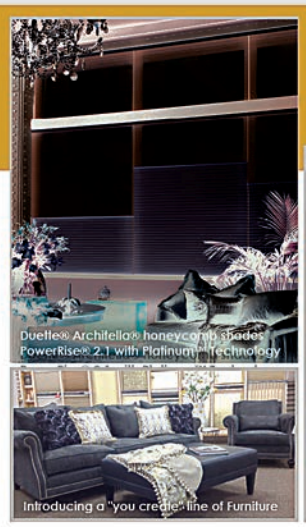
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Editor's Pick

After being rescheduled during Motor City Pride, the divas are back in the D this month with "A Night to Remember: Disco Divas." The show will feature disco legends Martha Wash, Thelma Houston, Maxine Nightingale, Cheryl Lynn and Anita Ward. DJ will be DJ Stacey "Hotwaxx" Hale.

Houston topped the charts with "Don't Leave Me This Way." British singer Nightingale is known for her hit, "Right Back Where We Started From." Lynn's big disco hit is best remembered as "Got to Be Real." The evening begins at 8:30 p.m. Friday, July 24 at Chene Park, 2600 E. Atwater, Detroit. Tickets are $26 for lawn; pavilion and pit seating ranges from $35-65. For more information, visit www.cheneparkdetroit.com.

Happenings

OUTINGS

Thursday, July 16

MAC Health 1 a.m. Michigan AIDS Coalition (MAC), **Detroit.** www.Michiganaidscoalition.org

Ann Arbor Street Art Fair 10 a.m. Ann Arbor Art Fair, **Ann Arbor.** www.Artfair.org

Summer of Service Open House 11 a.m. Detroit VA, **Detroit.** www.Va.gov/vasummerofservice/.

Friday, July 17

Garden Tour 6 p.m. Tickets: $75. Detroit's Historic Palmer Woods Garden Tour, **Detroit.** www.Palmerwoods.org

LGBT Dinner 6:30 p.m. Lansing Association for Human Rights, **Lansing.** www.Lahronline.org/

MAC Health 11 p.m. Michigan AIDS Coalition (MAC), **Detroit.** www.Michiganaidscoalition.org

Saturday, July 18

bare: a pop opera 8 p.m. Tickets: $15-20.Five percent of proceeds to benefit Affirmations. Detroit Actor's Theatre Company, 22331 Woodward Ave., **Ferndale.** www.Thedatc.org

Julianne and Derek Hough: Move Live On Tour 2015 8 p.m. Tickets: $25-79.50. Olympia Entertainment, 2211 Woodward Ave., **Detroit.** 313-471-6611. www.Olympiaentertainment.com

The Wizard of Oz 8 p.m. Free. Cinetopia, 2826 Bagley Ave., **Detroit.** www.Cinetopiafestival.org

Sunday, July 19

LGBT Parenting Support Group 1 a.m. The purpose of the group is for LGBT families to have a monthly opportunity to get together to get to know one another and to discuss topics of interest.Free. Organization Name, 318 W. Nine Mile, **Ferndale.** 248-955-3219. info@naturesplayhouse.com www.Naturesplayhouse.com/

Bisexual Peer Group 4 p.m. Our group meets monthly on the third Sunday & discussion relates to bisexual identity. Building is handicap accessible using ramp to rear entrance. Bisexual Peer Group, 319 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor.** paylor9@icloud.com Facebook.com/groups/110918256984/

Monday, July 20

Lansing Capital Roller Derby Summer Boot Camp 6 p.m. Six week, 12 session Roller Derby basic skills training boot camp. $60 due day 1 of camp, accepting cash or check. Open to both men and women. Lansing Capital Roller Derby , 7868 Old M-78 , **East Lansing .** lcrdbootcamp@mittenmavens.net www.Mittenmavens.net/join/bootcamp

Tuesday, July 21

Karaoke and Half Off Wine \aut\BAR, 315 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor.** 734-994-3677. www.Autbar.com

MAC Health 2 p.m. Michigan AIDS Coalition (MAC), **Detroit.** www.Michiganaidscoalition.org

Wednesday, July 22

Free Pool and $1 Off Beer \aut\BAR, 315 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor.** 734-994-3677. www.Autbar.com

MAC Health 10 a.m. Michigan AIDS Coalition (MAC), **Detroit.** www.Michiganaidscoalition.org

Free to be Me Group 12:30 p.m. This is a support group for people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning. The Jewish Gay Network of Michigan (JGN), 6600 W. Maple Road, **West Bloomfield.** 248-432-5467. www.Jgnmi.org

MAC Health 6 p.m. Michigan AIDS Coalition (MAC), 290 W. Nine Mile Road, **Ferndale.** 248-398-7105. www.Michiganaidscoalition.org

Thursday, July 23

Trivia with Terry and Thirsty Thursday Half off beer and well drinks with student ID. \aut\BAR, 315 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor.** 734-994-3677. www.Autbar.com

MAC Health 2 p.m. Mondays by appointment only. Michigan AIDS Coalition (MAC), **Ferndale.** www.Michiganaidscoalition.org

Pearl, Katya, Trixie and Violet 8 p.m. Murray & Peter, 7096 E. 14 Mile Road, **Warren.** 586-268-3200. www.Neptix.com

Season 7 Contestants from RuPaul's Drag Race 8 p.m. Tickets: $25+. Murray & Peter, 7096 E. 14 Mile Road, **Warren.** 586-268-3200. www.Neptix.com

Friday, July 24

A Night to Remember: Disco Divas Chene Park, **Detroit.** 313-393-7128. www.Cheneparkdetroit.com

Bistro Fridays Special menu. \aut\BAR, 315 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor.** 734-994-3677. www.Autbar.com

Divas Night Out: The King & Queens Ball Chene Park, 2600 Atwater, **Detroit.** www.Cheneparkdetroit.com

Second Annual HIR Golf Outing/ Fundraiser 7 p.m. Holland is Ready, 4600 Macatawa Legends Blvd, **Holland.** www.Hollandisready.org

Saturday, July 25

turnIT aut \aut\BAR, 315 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor.** 734-994-3677. www.Autbar.com

Gay Straight Alliance in Berrien County 2 p.m. LGBTQ youth, friends and allies, ages 14-18. OutCenter, 124 Water St., **Benton Harbor.** 269-925-8330. www.Outcenter.org

Pride Mini Ball 6 p.m. StatusSexy.com, **Detroit.** www.Statussexy.com

Ides of March 8 p.m. Tickets: $30-40. The Acorn Theater, 107 Generations Dr., **Three Oaks.** 269-756-3879. www.Acorntheater.com

Sunday, July 26

Salsa Night Salsa lessons. $1 tacos. \aut\BAR, 315 Braun Ct., **Ann Arbor.** 734-994-3677. www.Autbar.com

Yoga and Pilates in the Garden 12 p.m. Tickets: $0-10. The Scarab Club, 217 Farnsworth, **Detroit.** 313-831-1250. www.Scarabclub.org

MUSIC & MORE

Ann Arbor Art Fair "Ann Arbor Street Art Fair" . Downtown Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor. July 16 - July 18. www.Artfair.org

Jazz Cafe "Sky Covington Live at Jazz Cafe" Sky Covington will be performing three sets of original, standards & improvisational music with her band Club Crescendo.Tickets: $15. Jazz Cafe, 350 Madison Ave., DETROIT. 7 p.m. July 17. 586-362-7460. www.Skycovington.net

POPULUX "Sunday Matinee" Soulful & classic house on the patio with DJs Al Ester & John "Jammin" Collins. No cover. 21+ welcome. POPULUX, 4120

See Happenings, page 30

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Editor's Pick

Boy George's famous '80s band is coming to Ontario for a special concert at Caesars Windsor. One of the most successful and globally recognized musical groups of the '80s, Boy George and Culture Club are set to perform live for the first time on the Colosseum stage this August.

For the first time in more than 14 years, all of the original band members – Boy George, Mikey Craig, Roy Hay and Jon Moss – will take the stage. Look for some of their greatest hits and new original songs, including favourites "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me," "Karma Chameleon," "Church of the Poison Mind," "Miss Me Blind" and more.

Culture Club will perform at 9 p.m. Friday, Aug. 7. Tickets start at $55 Canadian. Caesars Windsor is located at 377 Riverside Dr. E., Windsor, ON, Canada. For more information, visit www.caesars.com/caesars-windsor.

► Happenings

Continued from page 28

Woodward Ave., Detroit. June 28 - July 26. www.Populuxdetroit.com

Quicken Loans "Free Summer in the Parks" Running through Sept. 2, will be held in: Campus Martius/Cadillac Square, Capitol Park, Grand Circus and Paradise Valley. Four historic parks, Detroit. June 4 - Sep. 2.

THEATER

2AZ Michael Brian Ogden's world premiere thriller digs deep into the recesses of our souls to face the monster that may be lurking in all of us. Tickets: $12-42. The Purple Rose Theatre Company, 137 Park St., Chelsea. Through Aug. 29. 734-433-7673. www.purplerosetheatre.org

A Midsummer Night's Dream In Royal Athens, the conventions of tradition, archaic law and patriarchy rule the day; in the forest, magic, mystery and mischief rule the night. Tickets: $36-40; previews are PWYC or 2-for-1. Michigan Shakespeare Festival, Baughman Theatre of the Potter Center on the campus of Jackson College, 2111 Emmons Rd., Jackson. Through July 18. 517-796-8600. www.michiganshakespearefestival.com

Alice in Wonderland . Riverwalk Theatre, 228 Museum Dr., Lansing. July 17 - July 26. 517-482-5700. www.Riverwalktheatre.com

Always a Bridesmaid Four friends have sworn to keep the promise they made on the night of their Senior Prom: to be in each other's weddings - no matter what. Tickets: Tickets: $35-41. The Dio - Dining & Entertainment, The Dio - Dining and Entertainment, 135 E. Main St., Pinckney. Through Aug. 2. 517-672-6009. www.diotheatre.com

Banana for Turtle A set of vignettes that involves five animal friends: Monkey, Python, Parrot, Elephant and Turtle. Created in the style of classical marionette, the performance speaks humorously to issues of early childhood. Tickets: $5-10. PuppetART, 25 E. Grand River Ave., Detroit. Through Aug. 15. 313-961-7777. www.puppetart.org

Beaches Be Trippin' See See Bloomers and Whitney Hillary meet cute at a young age on the Jersey Shore and become fast friends. A lifetime of penpal-ism prepares them for a future of laughs, jealousy, big hair, Otto Titsling, and, ultimately (spoiler alert!), death. Tickets: $10-20. The Ringwald Theatre, 22742 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Through Aug. 3. 248-545-5545. www.theringwald.com

Ernie On Detroit Tigers' announcer Ernie Harwell's last night at Comerica Park in September 2009, he encounters an unusual boy who is eager to know all about him, coaxing Harwell into giving one final broadcast the "broadcast of his life." Tickets: $20-25. City Theatre, 2301 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Through Aug. 2. 313-471-6611. www.olympiaentertainment.com

Hatfield's & McCoy's We have all heard of this feud, but who knows the truth! No one, really. This musical comedy adaptation is sure to help you pick sides. Tickets: $43.50; includes meal and show. Cornwell's Dinner Theatre, 18935 15 1/2 Mile Rd., Marshall. Through Aug. 22. 269-781-4293. www.turkeyville.com

Michigan Shakespeare Festival . Michigan Shakespeare Festival, Baughman Theatre, Jackson. Through July 19.

Old Love GEM Theatrics, the husband and wife acting team of Gary E. Mitchell and Mary Beth Quillin, returns with this contemporary romantic comedy by Norm Foster. Tickets: $20. The Snug Theatre, 160 S. Water St., Marine City. Through July 26. 810-278-1749. www.riverbanktheatre.com

Peter Pan This high-flying Tony Award-winning musical whisks audiences away to a place where dreams are born and no one ever grows up. Tickets: $12-33. Tibbits Summer Theatre, 14 S. Hanchett St., Coldwater. Through July 18. 517-278-6029. www.tibbits.org

Smokey Joe's Cafe Come out for a journey through rock 'n' roll history: Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller graced the charts with their unforgettable music and lyrics, and now you can hear nearly 40 of their hits all together in a musical revue that illuminates the golden age of American culture. Tickets: $15-30. Hope Summer Repertory Theatre, DeWitt Theatre, 141 E. 12th St., Holland. Through Aug. 7. 616-395-7890. www.hope.edu/hsrt

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged) This fast-paced show parodies Shakespeare's works, attempting to highlight - or at least mention - all of them in under 90 minutes, with a cast of just 3 actors. Tickets: $10. The Penny Seats Theatre Company, West Park, 215 Chapin St., Ann Arbor. Through July 25. 734-926-5346. www.pennyseats.org

To Kill a Mockingbird Through courage and compassion, lawyer Atticus Finch seeks truth and justice, while his feisty daughter, Scout, learns what it means to be an instrument of hope. Tickets: $15-24. Hope Summer Repertory Theatre, DeWitt Theatre, 141 E. 12th St., Holland. Through Aug. 8. 616-395-7890. www.hope.edu/hsrt

ART 'N' AROUND

N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art " Susan Aaron-Taylor: Journeying" . N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, 52 E. Forest, Detroit. June 12 - Aug. 22.

Detroit Artists Market (DAM) "The Essential Self: Meditations on the Politics of Identity" . Detroit Artists Market, 4719 Woodward Ave., Detroit. June 12 - July 18. 313-832-8540. www.Detroitartistsmarket.org

Flint Institute of Arts "Beauty, Passion and Bliss: 19th Century Masterworks" . Flint Institute of Arts, 1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint. May 17 - Aug. 16. 810-234-1695. www.Flintarts.org

MOCAD "The Obama Paintings and the Lincoln Monument" . Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, 4454 Woodward Ave., Detroit. May 15 - Aug. 2. 313-832-6622. www.Mocadetroit.org

N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art "Sam Gilliam: Prints" . N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, 52 E. Forest, Detroit. June 12 - Aug. 22.

N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art "Gregory Coates: Minutes" . N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, 52 E. Forest, Detroit. June 12 - Aug. 23.

robert kidd gallery "Tom Parish: Venezia" . robert kidd gallery, 107 Townsend St., Birmingham. July 17 - Aug. 15. 248-642-3909. www.Robertkiddgallery.com

The Scarab Club "Jerome Ferretti" . The Scarab Club, 217 Farnsworth, Detroit. July 1 - Aug. 15. 313-831-1250. www.Scarabclub.org

The Scarab Club "Cool & Warm: Scott Dolan & Jeanne Ruzzin" . The Scarab Club, 217 Farnsworth, Detroit. July 1 - Aug. 29. 313-831-1250. www.Scarabclub.org

The Scarab Club "Third Thursday" . The Scarab Club, 217 Farnsworth, Detroit. March 19 - Aug. 20. 313-831-1250. www.Scarabclub.org

UMMA "Julian Schnabel" . University Of Michigan Museum Of Art, 525 S. State St., Ann Arbor. July 1 - Sep. 27. 734-763-4186. www.Umma.umich.edu

Roses Are Red, Violets Are Blue

Season 7 'Drag Race' Winner Heads To Detroit

BY SHELBY CLARK PETKUS

Violet Chachki

Show producers Murray & Peter are hosting an evening of world class drag performances July 23 in Warren, showcasing some of the most well-known – and even controversial – contestants of Season 7 of "RuPaul's Drag Race." Featured queens include this season's Miss Congeniality, Katya Zamolodchikova. The faux-Russian queen is known for her comedy and lip-synchs. Trixie Mattel, another comedy queen known for her unique look, was the only contestant this season to be booted – then brought back!

Rounding out the drag roster are two of the "Top 3" of this past season: Violet Chachki and Pearl. Chachki, the winner of the season, spoke with Between the Lines about her fans, her recently released album "Gagged" and her take on social justice.

What was the process behind your album? How was working with Tommy Lee (who helped produce the lead single, "Bette.)?

I'm really happy with how it turned out. I'm so honored to even have the opportunity to do it. I've listened to lots of different music that has that same kind of (industrial) feel to it. I don't usually perform music that's in that genre, but I definitely get ready to (that sound), relax to, listen to it. It might potentially get remixed and get played somewhere someday, hopefully! (Tommy) is such a sweetheart, such a nice guy. We're actually going to his show in Atlanta in, I think, August.

I wouldn't have pegged you for a Tommy Lee girl, but you've surprised people with how you work in different genres. Similarly, have you been surprised by a fanbase you weren't expecting?

Yeah! I remember being at Drag Con (May 16-17), and these little tiny children – had to be 7 or 8, all small children – and they're with their parents, they'd come up to me and go, "We're such huge fans." And I was like, "Oh..." I consider myself to be a little bit of an adult entertainer, and I don't know, I've never really seen drag as a children's form of entertainment. It's so cool to see such open-minded parents and kids; these kids are going to remember this for the rest of their lives, meeting me, going to Drag Con.

INFO

'Drag Race' @ Andiamo

8 p.m., July 23

7096 E. 14 Mile Road, Warren, MI 48092

www.andiamoitalia.com

Speaking of youth, I know you've been a big advocate for LGBT youth and other social justice issues. Can you speak about that?

Yeah, I definitely get almost emotional – which is not a scene that happens a lot in my life – but when I see kids saying they're getting inspired by my confidence and that it helps them get through things, I love that. I hope more youth look to me for confidence and guidance, and are inspired in their own lives. I think it's a great time to be a queer youth.

In addition to LGBTQ activism, what are your thoughts on social justice issues for kinks and fetishes? I know you have experience in those scenes and reference them on your album.

There definitely is a stigma attached, and I'm working to break that stigma, actually. I'm very sex positive, I'm very body positive. I know it can get really complicated with fetishes and fetishizing trans people. I think you

See Violet, page 32

BTL
Join The Conversation

► Violet
Continued from p. 31

need to deal with it on a case by case basis. But as far as sex positivity goes, I think one thing for me is bringing things into a positive light regardless of what stigma is attached to them. Separating fact from fiction in the fetish community. One of the biggest stereotypes of fetish (is that it's) this huge, ridiculous sex thing, and it's usually not. It's usually just good, sex-based fun. I think some people think it's dirty or wrong, and it's really not.

What were you feelings after the Supreme Court same-sex marriage ruling?

I thought it was about time, especially since a lot of my friends had already been married. My drag mom is married. Part of me is like, "finally." But a part of me is, "Well yeah, duh." It's been a long time coming. It's amazing that it happened – I was actually on my way to Mexico when it happened, so we actually celebrated in Mexico at Mexico Pride. It's an incredible time to be a young person, a queer person, a trans person. There's a voice for everyone it seems like now, and the voice is only getting louder and stronger. It's an amazing time to be alive right now.

You were one of the more controversial winners of "RuPaul's Drag Race" – how has that affected your "reign" so far?

I've proved people wrong my whole life, and that's why I am where I am now. I'm determined and I'm resilient and I don't really owe anybody anything. I think I'm a really good representation for the show and for the network, and if someone doesn't think that, it's their own problem.

You're known for your love of fashion – are there any plans in that area?

(Laughs) There are, there are. Really exciting plans, actually. They're not entirely finalized, but I love designing. It's one of my favorite things to do. The "Hello Kitty" challenge on the show was one of my favorite things to do. I love working with my hands; I love designing stuff, and I love fashion. I think it's a dumb decision not to do something in fashion ... I have to do it, you know. Especially before they announce the Season 8 winner! (Laughs) God, they just churn you out and then it's onto the next season!

Speaking of next season, there are murmurings about a potential second season of "RuPaul's All Stars Drag Race." Have you heard anything about that?

There *is* potentially talk about "All Stars 2." I have heard about queens clearing their schedules here and there. No one has told me anything – I'm too busy to be paying attention – but queens have been clearing their schedule and it's super exciting. They definitely need to do an "All Stars 2."

> *"It's an incredible time to be a young person, a queer person, a trans person. There's a voice for everyone it seems like now, and the voice is only getting louder and stronger. It's an amazing time to be alive right now."*

About queens and gossip: I've heard that Pearl's been canceling gigs.

Oh. That whole... well, it happened in New York. I was working with her that whole day actually, and while I was coming from Mexico, she was in a float in the parade. Apparently it was super hot and apparently she fell off of the float and hit her head. Because she couldn't make our American Apparel meet and greet or the "Night of 1000 Queens" event, some other queens then went online and said she was lazy and doesn't want to work hard – which probably is all true. But I think she really did injure herself in that particular event. She was telling me recently that she did, in fact, hit her head and couldn't make it. When you're in the spotlight, people want to make assumptions about you. I am one of Pearl's best friends, and I want to believe the best in her, and for that event, I believe her.

I've noticed there's "Pearlet" online, where fans of the show hope for a romance between you two. How does that feel to have fans pushing for that?

There's definitely a relationship – I don't know if it's the kind they're wanting or expecting, but me and Pearl love each other so much. My character *is* all about mystery.

Do you have any questions about Metro Detroit before you come to Warren for your show?

I think I'll just ask all the boys on Grindr when I get there. (Laughs)

General admission tickets are $25. VIP reserved seats are $60-75 and include a meet and greet with all the queens; call 248-268-2840 for reservations. Guests are welcome to take pictures and get autographs. Private tables and bottle service are also available. Tables are located on the main floor surrounding the main stage and catwalk. Local female impersonators will also be performing during this show. Cocktails and dinner is available throughout the night. Tickets are on sale at www.neptix.com

► **Raining Divas**
Continued from p. 23

Maxine Nightingale

London-born Nightingale got her start performing in shows such as "Hair" and "Savages" in London's fabled West End. Though it received little notice, she released her first album on Pye Records in 1969. Nightingale was initially reluctant to give a recording career a second try when approached by producer Pierre Tubs, but once convinced, "Right Back Where We Started From" became an instant hit, reaching the Top 10 in the UK in 1975 and going all the way to No. 2 when it was released in the States the following year.

When Nightingale released her third album in 1978, it spawned another massive hit – the ballad "Lead Me On." The song was written by legendary songwriter and Detroit native Allee Willis (the Pointer Sisters' "Neutron Dance" and "I'll Be There For You," the theme from "Friends").

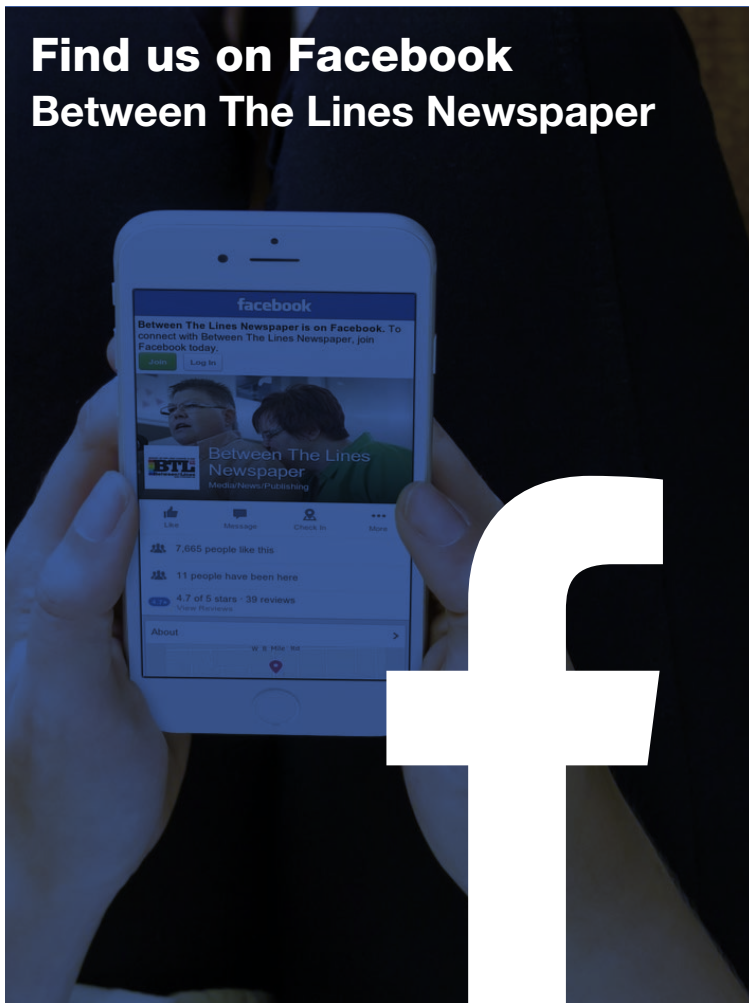
Anita Ward

While no one likes to be called a one-hit Wonder that, sadly, is the fate that befell Ward. Before she ever thought of a career in music, Ward earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Rust College in Holly Springs, Miss., and became a teacher. Singer-turned-producer Frederick Knight originally wrote the song "Ring My Bell" for singer Stacy Lattisaw. When he presented it to Ward, she was not impressed. A few lyrical changes later, however, he convinced her to record it and it soared up the charts. "Bell" became a No. 1 hit on Billboard's Hot 100, R&B Singles and Dance Music charts in 1979. It also topped the charts in the UK and Canada. Though she was never able to reach the Top 40 again, Ward's place in music history is secured thanks to this smash hit.

A Taste of Honey

Though Taste started as a foursome, they are best known as duo Janice Marie Johnson and Hazel Payne. Signed to a five-album contract with Capitol Records, Taste hit their stride right out of the gate. Their first single, "Boogie Oogie Oogie," spent three weeks at No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1978. "Boogie" also topped the R&B and Dance charts and went on to earn the group two platinum records – one for the single and one from the self-titled album it appeared on. Taste would go on to win a Grammy for Best New Artist.

Though subsequent dance tracks failed to make any musical waves, the group's cover of the Kyu Sakamoto song "Sukiyaki," from their third album, "Twice As Sweet," reached No. 1 on the Billboard R&B and Adult Contemporary charts and No. 3 on the Hot 100. Payne eventually dropped out of the duo, leaving Johnson to record a solo album to fulfill contractual obligations. Currently, Johnson tours alone to keep the group's legacy alive.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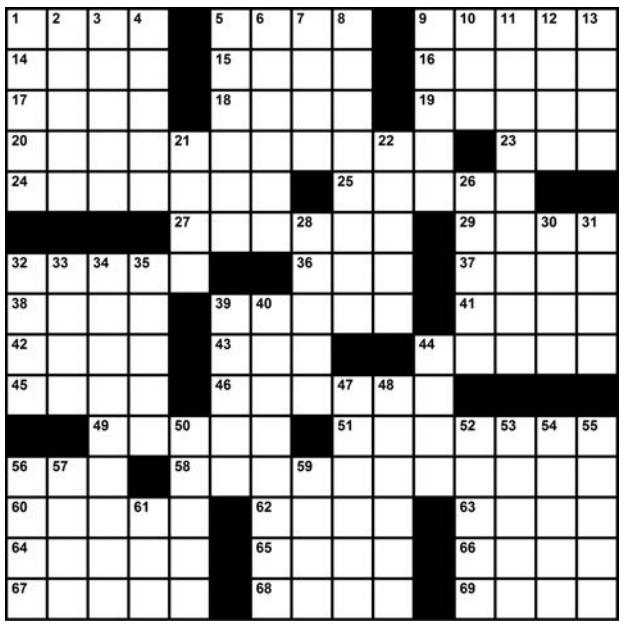

Across

1 He comes between Tom and Harry
5 Similar things
9 Flaming queen's crime?
14 Neighbor of Pakistan
15 "East of Eden" director Kazan
16 Put it in your mouth with relish
17 What a computer may spit out
18 Italian wine city
19 Taper off
20 Secretly gay rock and roll front man
23 "It's ___ for Me to Say" (Mathis)
24 Stamp of "Priscilla"
25 Battlefield cry
27 For skin
29 Slinky shape
32 Vehicles for some dykes
36 Stuff from your shaft
37 What guns shoot off
38 Dryer batch
39 Lech of Greek lore
41 Wharton degs.
42 Holds title to
43 Its head may be enjoyed orally
44 They come during finals week
45 Diggs of "Rent"
46 Treat badly
49 Write "The Hot'l Baltimore"
51 Some Barber compositions
56 Chop down
58 Secretly gay C&W singer turned pop star
60 "I Dream of Jeannie"'s Barbara, and others
62 Cut it
63 Regarding
64 "To recap..."
65 His brother laid him in his grave
66 "A Boy Named Sue" writer Silverstein
67 Dull surface
68 Neil Patrick's award for Hedwig
69 Cocksure Aesop character

Down

1 Performed, for Shakespeare
2 About to blow
3 Furnish food
4 Jack on the card table
5 Medium meeting
6 Heavy overcoat
7 Maupin setting for tales
8 Pass to a gay receiver?
9 Oscar, for one
10 Soldier under Stonewall Jackson
11 Secretly gay hip-hop mogul
12 Not taken in by
13 No, to Nureyev
21 They may be split
22 Conger catcher
26 Start of Caesar's boast
28 Norman Bates' place
30 "___ your disposal"
31 Bad bottom-line news
32 Rorschach stain
33 "The Music Man" setting
34 Secretly gay rapper/entrepreneur
35 Ford flub
39 Fill for you-mouthful
40 Urban pussy
44 Half scores
47 Grand slam title won frequently by Billie Jean King
48 Way to miss
50 "C'est Moi," to Lancelot
52 Up to one's ears
53 Campbell of "Martin"
54 Last word of a fairy tale
55 Got to second base, perhaps
56 Lammy winner Scott
57 Harvey's _Hairspray_ role
59 Western wolf
61 Testacle, in slang

Solution below

A Couple of guys
by Dave Brousseau
"Weather or Not"
AND I--
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e-mail:acoupleofguys@qsyndicate.com
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EVERYTHING STOPS WHEN BLAKE ASHFORD COMES ON.
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www.facebook.com/acoupleofguys
RIIIIGHT. AND YOU KNOW HE'S GAY BECAUSE...?
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Puzzle on this page

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